

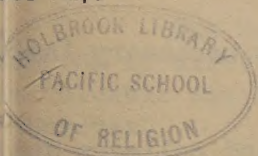
To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which
where in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church;
to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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RURAL CHURCH ADVANCE*

Foreword

The importance of the rural community as the reservoir from which life flows into the urban parts of our country must not be overlooked. Since that is true, the rural church is of basic significance to the nation and to the denomination for the training which young people receive in their home church in their childhood and youth is likely to influence them for good or for ill far more than anything that the city church can do after they come into the urban scene. Since religion is of basic significance to our total culture and the future of civilization rests upon the effectiveness of our Christian movement, we can see how important this conference for advance becomes.

Certain basic principles underlie any planning for the church anywhere. Some of these are, first, that the church must be related to the total life of the community. Whenever religion becomes a part-time interest of people, it ceases to have any vital place at all. Only those whose religion is related to the whole of life and therefore to the total life of the community have found that effective relation to God which Jesus Christ intended to bring to his people.

Our proposals must be practical in the sense that they can actually be made effective. We frequently dream of the things that would be good to do if only this or that could be brought about. As a matter of fact, such solutions are no solutions at all. Our conference must be satisfied with nothing but proposals that can actually be made effective in the real town and country scene.

The educational institutions must take a vital interest in all of these plans. It is of great importance for the institutions themselves that they shall relate themselves vitally to the churches and the communities from which they draw their people. Perhaps one of the basic weaknesses in the life of our denomination is the fact that the educational institutions and the churches have not been closely enough related so that each has realized the part it plays in the

* Careful planning for rural church advance is one of the most hopeful developments of the post-war period. Various denominations have held national conferences on rural church development. The most recent of these was the Northern Baptist Churches in Town and Country at Green Lake, Wisconsin, July 28 to August 3, 1948. We are glad to present here a summary report of this significant conference because it is relevant to the entire rural church movement.

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life of the other. This is something that should be worked out in this conference.

Out of this conference there should come not only plans but a sense of solidarity among all of the people who are working in this field. We should not go forward feeling that we are alone, but we should go forward feeling that all together we can meet and overcome any difficulties that are in the way and accomplish the results that ought to be brought to pass.

Recruitment

Recruitment on three levels is required to enlist the necessary leadership for our rural task in the Northern Baptist Convention:

- (1) Teachers and research specialists to staff the seminaries and colleges and other training institutions and centers for the training of rural ministers and leaders.
- (2) Executives for the administration of town and country or rural programs on area, state or national levels, including directors of state, town and country programs and supervisory personnel for internship and experimental programs.
- (3) Qualified students to prepare themselves in both short term and long term educational programs for the rural ministry.

Competent young people must be recruited for the rural ministry preferably at a sufficiently early stage to enable training to be geared to this end. This recruiting activity may take place at schools, including agricultural, vocational high schools and colleges, through college and university pastors, by the cultivation of rural churches through all available agencies including the Baptist Youth Fellowship, through farm youth organizations, extension programs and summer service projects.

In-Service Training

Long-range plans for in-service training -

- (1) A broad program of denominational education on the town and country church.
- (2) The establishment of a Lending-Library service, created by the Associated Home Mission Agencies, for use by rural ministers and enthusiastically promoted.
- (3) The development by seminaries or colleges of an effective extension service to reach the specific needs of town and country pastors and churches in its area, using such methods of service as correspondence courses and short term study and discussion courses, preferably for credit, offered at convenient locations.
- (4) The establishment of Regional Training Schools under the joint sponsorship of the Associated Home Mission Agencies and the particular seminaries in a given area. We urge the establishment of one or two such schools in the present fiscal year for experimentation, and the extension of this program

as rapidly as possible thereafter. The school should be of ten to twelve days' duration, with courses in the field of rural life and of rural church, with instruction by academically qualified instructors. Certificates of achievement should be issued, and seminaries urged to grant credit for work of standard quality and quantity done in these schools.

Support of the Ministry

A planned approach toward adequate support of a trained ministry in town and country is urgent and should be a matter of earnest concern for church people. Consecrated and able ministers who feel called to the rural ministry are often forced to leave because they cannot support their families on the income from these churches. If they do remain in rural fields, financial worries make it impossible for them to do their best work. Moreover, men from our seminaries are not attracted to town and country fields because of the low incomes provided, or the uncertainty of the income.

The level of rural church life will remain low so long as there is inadequate ministerial leadership by reason of inadequate financial support. This ultimately affects the level of church life in the entire denomination.

The present high cost of living has created acute financial problems for many pastors.

It is recognized that one of the primary factors in securing adequate support for a rural minister is the quality of the man himself. If he comes with no particular feeling of a call to the rural field, cannot adapt himself to living in village or country, and has no sense of the missionary character of his work, it is likely that no mere methods of finance will guarantee an adequate income. Nevertheless, it is also true that possessing the right attitudes and a sense of mission, the rural minister needs financial security as well as any of his fellow-workers.

"Adequate ministerial support" presupposes the practice of economy on the part of the pastor and his family but should make reasonable provision for

Material needs: food, clothing, comfortable housing, fuel, light, water, and telephone.

Cultural needs: books, magazines, conferences, schools and education of children.

Health needs: doctor and dentist bills, etc.

Traveling expense: payment for use of car - mileage basis or flat sum.

Giving: including the many calls for financial help which come to the minister.

Saving: for emergencies and old age, through insurance and Ministers & Missionaries Benefit Board.

Office expense: postage, stationery, printing, office equipment should be cared for by the church apart from the pastor's salary.

Adequate ministerial support in any particular case is affected by:

Size of family and number of other dependents.

Location and type of church or churches: open-country, village, suburban or industrial town.

Number of churches served and size of parish.
Amount of driving required and condition of pastor's car.
Indebtedness or other obligations minister must meet.
General health conditions of minister and family.
Cost of living in this locality and at this particular time.
Condition of equipment in the parsonage.

For Immediate Action-

That a presentation of the need to meet salary problems caused by rising costs be made in each association and state convention at the earliest opportunity.

That state conventions seek in 5% of the town and country churches each year the adoption of a definite program of proportionate giving.

That the Committee on the Crusade for Christ through Stewardship be urged to consider the needs of the town and country churches.

That the Crusade for Christ through Stewardship lay special stress on the tithing principle as applied to the town and country churches.

That an earnest attempt be made to secure the adoption of an adequate minimum salary plan in at least three states by 1951.

That state conventions provide opportunities for presentation of the idea of the productive home and related skills through institutes, conferences, and personal contacts with individual pastors.

That national and state laymen's councils be requested to assume responsibility for urging salary adjustments to meet present inflationary costs, either through the increasing of pastors' salaries or the granting of cost of living bonuses.

Public Relations

Consistent Christian Living is the church's best publicity. Jesus said "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven."

The following principles are basic, if we are to win men to Christ, build Christian character and develop Christian communities:

The Christian gospel is good news and the Christian layman is the best possible public relations agent.

The welfare of the total community should be at the heart of the church program.

The church must be alert to opportunities to render public service in the name of Christ.

A cooperative approach to the community should be made through working with other churches and groups.

The development of new and special programs which point up the relevance of the gospel to rural life is urgently needed.

An adequate program of publicity is needed which will include:

- Actual, newsworthy stories about the achievements of local churches.
- Stories which will present and interpret the total movement and planning in the town and country field.
- More effective use of radio, and audio-visual aids.

Local Church Programs

The need for improving the worship program of the town and country church is widespread. To this end "Hymns of The Rural Spirit" would become a valuable supplement to the regular hymnal and should be in use in all such churches.

The worship program would be further enriched by planned observances of the following special occasions: "Rural Life Sunday," "Harvest Festival Sunday," "Family Week" and special interdenominational observances.

Great care should be exercised in launching and completing the Lord's Acre project by appropriate services of worship.

In view of the great need for an effective evangelistic program in the Town and Country church, the Crusade for Christ through Evangelism should be continued in this area until 1951. Whatever adaptations of this Crusade are needed to fit the distinctive requirements of these churches should be made. Special emphasis should be placed at the point of training and using laymen in this project.

Missionary Education. With reference to the Missionary program of the Town and Country church, the following emphasis and proposals are made: A yearly missions program should be established with a month by month emphasis adapted to the interests and needs of all age levels.

Christian Education. We recognize that the family is the basic unit of Town and Country life and all our planning should be directly related to this fact. For strengthening the total Christian education program of churches in this area we urge that increasing stress be placed upon: more extensive use of teaching materials and leadership resources for all age groups now available.

Community Relations. As the Town and Country Church seeks to fulfill its real function in its community, participation in a community council of some sort becomes essential. Special study action groups in relation to the community and its needs should become part of the program of every church. Baptist church participation in local councils or committees of churches must be increasingly emphasized. In every community where conditions demand, consideration should be given to the wisdom as well as methods of uniting in Larger Parishes, Federated Churches, or a Community Church.

In view of the rising delinquency problem in rural areas, the Juvenile Protection program of our denomination should be carried to every town and country church through the cooperation of the department of Juvenile Protection with the Director of Town and Country Work and the Director of Christian Education.

Establishing Christian People in Town and Country Communities. The importance of devising a strategy for establishing Christian families in town and country communities cannot be too strongly emphasized. For this reason the following specific proposals are made:

Town and Country Commissions, Directors of Town and Country Work and State Executive Secretaries are urged to confer with the Farmers Home Administration and other agencies concerning procedures and values involved in establishing people in town and country communities.

The Department of Town and Country Work of the A.B.H.M.S. in consultation with State Conventions, should select twelve places over the nation, in which to test the plans for establishing Christian people in town and country communities. The results of this project should be reported at the first quadrennial conference in 1951.

Each Town and Country Director should be supplied with literature to distribute to the Town and Country churches of his area, dealing with information on father and son partnerships, and the transfer of farm property.

Each Town and Country church should be encouraged to appoint a committee on Establishing Christian Families in Town and Country communities. It will be the function of this committee to aid in making a complete survey of the community to discover the natural resources, service institutions and industrial opportunities which may be available for settlement of people. It will also be the function of this committee to make a survey of the church, constituency to discover needs among its own people.

Each Town and Country church be encouraged to study all forms of consumers, producers and mutual aid cooperatives with a view in utilizing such resources for the enrichment of life in the community.

The problems confronting us in Town and Country work are so tremendous that no one denomination is sufficient in and of itself to meet them. We therefore urge continued and increased cooperation of our Home Mission Societies in the Home Missions Councils of North America and specifically in its program in the Town and Country field.

The New Testament church, so uniquely pictured in the Acts, carried on a program, vigorous and comprehensive, which met many individual and group needs.

The church of the present century must emulate the New Testament Church. It must formulate its program so as to touch with the spirit of Christ every individual of its community, and from there reach into all the world.

The purpose of a program is to apply the gospel of Christ to the lives of individuals so that they may realize a well rounded and abundant life for Christ in their community.

This requires that the churches must be concerned with the social relations of people in their educational, recreational, economic and political life to the end that in their group and institutional life they may be motivated by the highest Christian ideals.